



SUCCESS STORY

Fair Test Opens Doors to Education

National testing provides high-school graduates with equal access to higher educational institutions



Photo by CEATM

The National Scholarship Test was administered at over 80 sites across Kyrgyzstan in 2005

“You don’t need money to continue your education at the university as before. It depends on your knowledge and education.”

-Jyldyz, one of the first students to take the National Scholarship Test.

Telling Our Story

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Jyldyz was among the first students to take the National Scholarship Test in Kyrgyzstan. When Jyldyz learned that she received one of the highest scores, her first thought was of her best friend Aisuluu, who graduated from the same remote village school a year earlier. The best student at her school, Aisuluu had wanted to study at the medical institute to become a doctor. Her dreams were shattered when she was told that she had failed the scholarship exam. She failed despite good performance because her family did not have the social status or money to bribe university administrators during the entrance examination. Upon her return to her village, Aisuluu became a victim of bridal kidnapping (a custom that still exists in many Kyrgyz villages) and was married against her will.

Jyldyz said to her sister-in-law, “Now that everything has changed, one does not need money to continue education at the university as before. I hope there will be some changes in the country, too, because these young people will be excellent specialists and will serve their country. I hope the younger generation will be the future of our country!”

Introduced in 2003, the National Scholarship Test created a transparent and fair way for high-school graduates to compete for government-provided scholarships at colleges and universities. From its inception, the testing has received extensive support from USAID. USAID’s National Scholarship Testing Initiative, implemented by the American Councils for International Education, helps administer tests at 40 to 80 sites for over 35,000 applicants each year, and promotes transparency and fairness of the examination and enrollment processes. Unlike regular entrance exams, the test is designed to measure aptitude (ability to learn), thereby providing an even playing field for applicants from schools in less advantaged and rural areas. The rectors of higher education institutions note that students enrolled through National Scholarship Testing have been successful in their studies.

Since 2004, testing design and implementation has been transferred to the Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM), an indigenous testing organization established by USAID, which designs and administers standardized tests.